



*Lessons from the Bay*

## Captain John Smith's Chesapeake Bay

**What was the Chesapeake Bay like when John Smith explored it, and how has the Bay changed since the early 17th century?**

### Objectives

Students will

- compare characteristics of today's Chesapeake Bay with the Bay as it existed in the early 17th century
- read excerpts from Smith's description of his exploration of the Bay and its rivers
- analyze Smith's map of the Chesapeake
- discuss the value of primary source documents and the challenges faced when using them.

### Background

In the summer of 1608, Captain John Smith made two voyages from Jamestown to explore the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Smith documented the natural environment, features of the land and waterways, and encounters with the native people. From this he wrote *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles*; he also created a reliable and influential map of the Chesapeake Bay and surrounding country.

In his account of the first voyage, Smith describes the Bay shoreline, the rivers, and the creeks and provides names for islands and other land features. He writes of his experiences with the natives, and he tells us of woods along the shore "frequented with wolues, Beares, Deere and other wild beasts [sic]."

Smith also describes fishing in the Bay. It was relatively easy due to the clarity of the water in those days. The dense forests surrounding the Bay and its rivers slowed sediment and freshwater runoff. Some scientists believe that, because so much freshwater was absorbed by trees, the Bay was saltier in Smith's day than it is today.

Smith relates a story in which, while using his sword to spear fish near the mouth of the Rappahannock, he was stung by a ray's poisonous tail. It was assumed he would die from the wound, and a grave was dug for the Captain. Smith recovered, and the place is still known as Stingray Point.

Aside from the obvious changes to the region brought by four centuries of development, the most significant differences are in the

### Related Standards of Learning

*Science:*

3.6; 3.10.b; 4.5.f; 4.8.a; 5.6.b;  
5.7.f; 6.7.a; 6.7.d; 6.7.e

*Mathematics:*

3.24

*English:*

3.1.a; 3.1.b; 3.1.c; 3.4.d; 3.6.a;  
3.6.b; 3.6.c; 3.10.b; 3.11.a; 4.1.b;  
4.3.a; 4.5.c; 4.7.a; 4.7.c; 4.8.a;  
5.1.a; 5.4.a; 5.6.c; 6.3.c; 6.5.c

*History and Social Science:*

3.3.b; 3.5.d; 3.6; VS.1.a; VS.1.d;  
VS.1.h; VS.2.c; USI.1.a; USI.1.e

### Time Required

One 30-minute session and two 45-minute sessions

### Materials

- Internet access
- John Smith's Virginia map, 1612 (optional, see Resources)

*For each student:*

- An Excerpt from John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles* (handout, page 117)

*For each group:*

- River and Place Names (handout, page 121)
- modern map, from an atlas or another source, of the Chesapeake Bay region, including Virginia and Maryland (optional)

quantity and variety of animals living in the Bay's ecosystem. Though the quantity of oysters have been in sharp decline until very recently, Smith writes that oysters in the early 17th century "lay as thick as stones." The Bay's fish population included "sturgeon, grampus, porpoise, seals, stingrays ... brits, mullets, white salmon [rockfish], trouts, soles, perch of three sorts" and a variety of shellfish (Chesapeake Bay Program, see Resources).

In this lesson, students will learn how to use primary source documents when studying history. Primary sources provide the learner with the perspective of one who lived through and observed an historic event. Students will analyze an excerpt from Smith's *Generall Historie* as well as Smith's 1608 map of Virginia. (Note: Smith's map was made in 1608 and published in 1612.) For more information about primary source documents and their use in the classroom, see Resources. (Also see "Using Maps" on page 51 of the **Project Action Guide**.)

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## Procedures

### Session 1 (30 minutes)

*Conduct this session in the classroom.*

1. Assess students' knowledge of Jamestown and Captain John Smith. If necessary, explain that he was a member of Jamestown's governing council and that Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay region and wrote a history of the early colony. Remind students that Jamestown was the first surviving English colony in America and that it was settled in 1607.
2. Discuss with students the differences between the Chesapeake Bay of 1607 and the Bay as it exists today. Ask students to speculate how the Chesapeake region might have looked to the Jamestown settlers as they sailed into the Bay and up the river that would come to be called the Powhatan, and later the James. *How might the water have looked? What would the settlers have noticed about the shoreline?* Compose a list on the board for use in Session 2.
3. Use information from the Background section of the lesson plan to enlighten students about the dense forests, clear water, and abundance of fish and animals present in the Bay region of the early 17th century. Tell students that it was common for those promoting the Virginia colony to compare the land to the Garden of Eden. Discuss the salinity of the water,

informing students that scientists believe the Bay was saltier in Smith's day than it is today. (The topic of salinity offers an opportunity to explain that the Bay is an estuary—a place where fresh water and salt water mix. Some fish live only in salt water, others only in fresh water, and still others can survive in both. See Extensions for Students.)

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### Session 2 (45 minutes)

*Conduct this session in the classroom.*

1. Explain to students the concept of using primary and secondary source documents to learn about historic events. Ask students to provide examples of each.
2. Provide each student with a copy of the handout "An Excerpt from John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles*." Explain that the excerpt is an example of a primary source document. Read the excerpt aloud to the class. Teachers of advanced students may choose to have the students read the excerpt.
3. Ask students what they notice about the excerpt. Discuss the spellings that today's reader finds odd, the dated use of language and phrasing, and the presence of humor. Ask students to identify some challenges facing a researcher who uses a primary source document. Point out that a reader will often face author biases when reading a primary source. Ask students if they can find an example of racial bias in the Smith excerpt. (Native people are referred to as "salvages" [savages].)
4. Ask students to speculate about Smith's reasons for writing this history.
  - *Would he have done it just for the income a published book might bring?*
  - *Or did he write it to benefit others?*
  - *Who might it benefit? Other explorers? Europeans considering a move to the New World?*
5. Finally, have students write a paragraph or two to describe the differences between the Bay in the early 17th century and the Bay as it exists today. Direct them to consult the list composed during Session 1. Also direct them to use the John Smith excerpt to note any differences not listed on the board. Encourage advanced students to support their claims when possible with quotes from Smith's writing.

### Session 3 (45 minutes)

*Conduct this session in the classroom or computer lab.*

1. Divide the class into groups of 2–3 students, or a size suitable to the number of available computers. Direct students to access the *Virtual Jamestown* Web site's "Original Maps" page (<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vcdh/jamestown/maps1.html>). Tell students to click the "Large Image" link beneath "John Smith's Map of Virginia, 1608." If possible, share with students the copy of Smith's map in the Library of Virginia's *Virginia in Maps* (see Resources). Explain that this map is another example of a primary source document. Discuss the map's orientation and features. (See "Using Maps" on page 51 of the **Project Action Guide**.)
2. Next, direct students back to the *Virtual Jamestown* "Original Maps" page, and have them click the "Zoomable Image" link beneath "John Smith's Map of Virginia, 1608 (Modified)." Allow time for the students to learn how to use the map tool.
3. Provide students with the "River and Place Names" handout, which includes a map of the Chesapeake region. Explain to students that the names listed in column A of the "River and Place Names" handout are found on the "Chesapeake Bay Region Today" map. Instruct students to use the "zoomable," modified version of John Smith's map to find the names listed in column B and then match them to the corresponding modern name in column A.

Remind students that on Smith's map, Virginia encompasses the entire Chesapeake region, including what is now Maryland. Also tell students that some of the names on the "River and Place Names" handout do not correspond exactly: a modern river name, like Nansemond for example, may correspond not with Smith's name for that river, but instead with a place or tribe living *close by* that river.

*For teachers of advanced students:*

Provide students with a modern map of the Chesapeake Bay region (from an atlas or another source) and the list from column B of the "River and Place Names" handout. Instruct students to use the "zoomable," modified version of John Smith's map to locate the rivers and places in the list you provided. Instead of completing the "River and Place Names" matching exercise, have students mark the modern map with markers or tags to indicate Smith's name for each river and place.

4. When students have finished, discuss the modern names of rivers and places. *Which have the same name, or similar names, on both maps?*
5. Discuss the benefits of maps to those who are studying history. Discuss the value of historic maps in providing a more accurate perspective of the time period being studied.

### Classroom Assessment Suggestions

- Discussion of differences between the 17th century Bay and today's Bay
- Discussion of the John Smith excerpt and the alternative spellings identified in the text
- Paragraphs describing the differences between John Smith's Bay and our Bay today, including the evidence used to support students' claims
- Students' ability to read maps and use the online "zoomable" map
- River and Place Names exercise

### Extensions for Students

- Use the Virtual Jamestown Web site's "John Smith Voyages of Exploration" map (see Resources) to follow the path of Smith's two voyages to explore the Bay region.
- Research estuaries and find how salinity affects organisms in the water. Learn what factors help establish the salinity levels in water and how the salinity varies from season to season. (See "Using the Library Media Center for Project Research" and "Using the World Wide Web for Project Research" on pages 55–58 of the **Project Action Guide**.)
- Visit one of the places John Smith describes in his *Generall Historie*.

### Resources

- Barbour, Philip L., ed. *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580–1631)*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986.
- "Captain John Smith." *Chesapeake Bay History*. Chesapeake Bay Program. <<http://www.chesapeakebay.net/jsmith.htm>>.
- "John Smith: Voyages of Exploration." *Virtual Jamestown*. <[http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vcdh/jamestown/smith\\_voyages/introduction.html](http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vcdh/jamestown/smith_voyages/introduction.html)>.
- Kupperman, Karen Ordahl, ed. *Captain John Smith: A Select Edition of His Writings*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988. ASIN 0807842087.
- "Library Research Using Primary Sources." U of California, Berkeley, Library. <<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/>>. (Click on "Guides," then on "Primary Research Sources.")
- "Process Guide #4: Primary Source Documents." San Diego City Schools, Dept. of Educational Technology. <<http://projects.edtech.sandi.net/staffdev/tpss99/processguides/HowToPrimaryS.html>>.
- Smith, John. *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles: with the names of the Adventurers, Planters, and Governours from their first beginning An: 1584. to this present 1624*. London, 1624.
- Smith, John. *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles: with the names of the Adventurers, Planters, and Governours from their first beginning An: 1584. to this present 1624. Travels and Works*. 1910. Ed. Edward Arber. Vol. 2. New York: Burt Franklin, 1967. 418–419. 2 vols.
- Stephenson, Richard W., and Marianne M. McKee, eds. *Virginia in Maps: Four Centuries of Settlement, Growth, and Development*. Richmond: Library of Virginia, 2000. ISBN 0884901922.
- "Using Primary Sources in the Classroom." *The Learning Page*. The Library of Congress. <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/primary.html>>.
- "Using the Library Media Center for Project Research." Project Action Guide. *Lessons from the Bay*. 55–56.
- "Using the World Wide Web for Project Research." Project Action Guide. *Lessons from the Bay*. 57–58.
- Virginia*. Map. Oxford, 1612.
- Virtual Jamestown*. Crandall Shifflett, 2000. <<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vcdh/jamestown/>>.

